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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

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**P = Presenter; M = Mark Mowlam**

**P:** Take a bestselling book, a great storyline and add a great cast, an experienced director and a large filming budget. And what do you get? A box office success, you would think. Think again. There’s no guarantee that a book that has enjoyed great success will make a good film. Some film adaptations have worked, others have flopped. So what’s the secret? That was the question I put earlier to film critic Mark Mowlam, who’s followed the progress of many book-to-film adaptations in his time and has recently reported on the making of Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*.

**M:** Well, the goal is really to make a good film that remains true to the spirit of the book. There are many examples of adaptations which have failed because they tried to remain too faithful to the plot and the characters of the book. Probably because at the time the producers worried that they’d alienate loyal readers if they departed too much from the original text. But in fact that’s a mistake: what works well on the page doesn’t necessarily work well on screen; you have to give the screenwriter freedom to create a script that flows, even if that means changing the original. So what we find is a lot of good films – *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Shining*, for example – that are completely unlike the original book. And readers are generally OK about this because they think of book and film as two separate works of art. But there are films that have managed to stay true to the book and still be good films. What they’ve done – a bit like in cooking, I suppose – is to put in all the book’s good ingredients and then boil them down to a concentrated mixture that’s packed with the flavour of the original work. Probably the best example of this is *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by Peter Jackson. The central theme of the book – which is a struggle between the forces of good and evil – perhaps wasn’t so difficult to portray, but J.R.R. Tolkien created a very original other world and reproducing that was a much more difficult task, because each reader has their own very distinct idea of what this world was like. I think Jackson did a fantastic job, using the spectacular scenery of New Zealand for the film’s location. The other thing about the *The Lord of the Rings* is that it’s a very substantial work – three books each containing over twenty long chapters – so Jackson had to leave some elements of the story out. To compensate for this, he took the most important scenes and then put all the emotional force behind these. The result is that it has become one of the most successful films of all time, a blockbuster that has grossed almost $3 billion.

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